

free access on virtually all products in our tariff schedules. This includes all consumer and industrial products. We will phase out tariffs on the remaining products within 10 years. Former Trade Representative Rob Portman called it "a high-quality, comprehensive free trade agreement that will contribute to economic growth and trade."

Unfortunately, some have sought to undermine the agreement. They have propagated myths that don't stand up to scrutiny. For example, despite claims to the contrary, Oman does not implement any aspect of the Arab boycott of Israel. Oman publicly affirms and has reaffirmed its position in a letter from its Commerce Minister in September 2005. Moreover, Oman neither tolerates nor allows the use of slave labor. Oman has made substantial commitments to the United States on labor reform, and it has promised to enact key reforms by October 31, 2006.

Rejecting the trade agreement would send a strong negative signal to our friends in the Middle East. Oman is a forward-looking Arab country on a range of social and economic issues. We must demonstrate our support to Oman, just as Oman has supported us.

As the 9/11 Commission advised, expanding trade with the Middle East will "encourage development, more open societies, and opportunities for people to improve the lives of their families." Passing the agreement before us will promote economic reform and development in the Persian Gulf, and it will advance our goal of a freer and more open Middle East. Quite simply, it will move our allies forward, and it will move America forward.

I urge my colleagues to demonstrate their commitment to these goals by voting to pass the Oman Free Trade Agreement later this morning.

I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there will now be a period for the transaction of morning business for up to 30 minutes, with the first half of the time under the control of the Democratic leader or his designee, and the second half of the time under the control of the majority leader or his designee.

The Senator from Illinois is recognized.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business for the minority side.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

DEMOCRATIC POLICY COMMITTEE HEARINGS

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I commend my colleague, Senator DORGAN of

North Dakota, for a hearing he held yesterday. It was a hearing of the Democratic Policy Conference. This is the 10th hearing he has held. I attended with several other Senators. The hearings are held on Monday because they cannot be held during the ordinary course of business of the Senate.

The reason, I am afraid, is very clear. Senator DORGAN is considering an issue which no other committee in Congress will consider. Senator DORGAN is raising questions which no other committee on Capitol Hill will even suggest. Senator DORGAN and the Democratic Policy Conference are calling witnesses to testify openly on issues which the majority in this Republican-led Congress will not even consider. What could that possibly be? It turns out to be the conduct of our war in Iraq and, particularly, the waste and mismanagement of Federal tax dollars.

Yesterday, there were several former employees of Halliburton. We all know them now; they are infamous. This is the company with the no-bid contracts—\$7 billion worth—and friends in high places all over this administration. This is the company which made millions of dollars off of taxpayer funds and, sadly, often at the expense of our soldiers.

Yesterday, the testimony was very clear. There was one witness who talked about this fitness center that was put up for our troops and an Internet center for our troops, and Halliburton was going to run it. It turns out they dramatically inflated the number of soldiers walking through the door so they could make more money on the center, ripping off the taxpayers. It turns out that the supplies they were given for our troops, Halliburton ended up consuming for their own employees, having Super Bowl parties, using the food and drink that had been prepared for our troops.

One of the witnesses yesterday said there was a certain arrogance of the Halliburton contractors when it came to our troops. They were annoyed when the soldiers asked for certain things. It was all about profit. It was all about them.

Why in the world hasn't a single committee in the Senate called Halliburton in to answer for these things? Because Halliburton has friends in high places. People don't ask these rude and embarrassing questions of this powerful special interest corporation.

I thank Senator DORGAN and the Democratic Policy Conference for continuing to bring in the whistleblowers. One would think there would be a Member of the Republican Senate embarrassed enough at Halliburton's conduct in this war in Iraq that they would join us in a bipartisan effort. Sadly, this do-nothing Republican Congress has been a coverup Republican Congress as well. They don't want to talk about it. They don't want to raise the questions.

Do you think the feature in the Washington Post this last Sunday

would have invoked at least some response from the Republican chairmen of major committees in the Senate? It was an exposé. It showed that when we created this provisional authority in Iraq to create a civil society, it turned out to be a patronage operation, worse than Brown and FEMA when it came to Katrina.

What they did was screen employees who were headed over to Iraq to spend billions of dollars and ask them probing questions about their qualifications. And do you know what the questions were. Here are some of the questions: How did you vote in the last primary? Did you vote for President Bush? What is your position on the issue of abortion? Where do you stand in terms of the Republican Party of America?

These were the questions asked of people we sent over to manage billions of dollars, our taxpayers' dollars, and rebuild Iraq. Is it any wonder we are in the fourth year in a war with no end? Is it any wonder that Iraq today is still in shambles from the viewpoint of its civil government? Is it any wonder when one looks at this gross incompetence, the same type of incompetence, patronage, and favoritism we saw, sadly, with Hurricane Katrina when Americans were disadvantaged?

There was a time in the history of this great institution when no President could get by with what this administration is getting by with. There was a time when a Democratic Senate would challenge a Democratic President, when a man named Harry Truman would stand up and say: We are going to look at profiteering and waste in waging the war against the Nazis and those who are their allies, even if we have a Democratic President, even if it might embarrass him.

Sadly, those days are gone. This Congress stands mute. This Congress refuses to ask the hard questions of this administration. This Congress refuses to acknowledge the obvious. We have lost 2,686 American soldiers in Iraq, and over 20,000 have returned home seriously injured. We have spent over \$325 billion. The scandalous conduct of contractors over there, deserving of investigation, has been made a matter of public record because of Senator DORGAN's hearings, and this administration and this Republican Congress refuse to ask the hard questions. Clearly, it is time for a change.

It is a time for new leadership that will ask these hard questions on behalf of our soldiers and our taxpayers.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from North Dakota.

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, how much time remains?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Five minutes.

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, I thank my colleague from Illinois. I appreciate him attending the hearing yesterday. As he indicated, we would prefer not to do oversight hearings. That is a job for

other committees. But because they have not done it, we have a responsibility to do them, and will.

We have done 10 oversight hearings with respect to contracting in Iraq. I am convinced the stories we have heard at these hearings undermine our American soldiers, undermine our troops, and cheat our taxpayers. I don't, for the life of me, understand why there is not aggressive activity in this Chamber and at the Pentagon to root out the waste, fraud, and abuse we have seen. It is almost as if there is a sleepwalk going on through these issues.

I have held hearings, and we have described all of the issues. Yesterday, a woman who worked for Halliburton went to Halliburton and said: What is happening is Halliburton is billing, in some cases, five times the amount they should be billing to the Federal Government for certain activities in Iraq.

For complaining to her superiors about the taxpayers being cheated by this contractor, she was put under guard by four civilians working for Halliburton, kept overnight, put on an airplane, fired, and shipped out of Iraq. That is what she got for being a whistleblower to talk about how the taxpayers were being cheated.

I am going to speak more about those issues this week with respect to all the hearings I have held. It is not for the purpose of injuring anybody. It is for the purpose of protecting our troops and our taxpayers.

Briefly, I want to describe something I am going to send over to the inspector general of the Defense Department today. This is a letter that was given to us yesterday at the hearing. It is a letter from Halliburton—Kellogg, Brown and Root, a subsidiary of Halliburton. It is from Mr. Standard, a civilian contract employee who was a truckdriver in Iraq who was wounded.

By the way, Halliburton hires these contract civilian employees through their subsidiary in the Cayman Islands. Why do they have a subsidiary in the Cayman Islands? That is a tax haven country. They get American contracts from our Government and run them through the Cayman Islands so they don't have to pay taxes.

This is from Mr. Standard, a truckdriver wounded in Iraq driving a convey as a civilian contract employee for Halliburton. Here is what Halliburton has written to this truckdriver:

I hope this finds you well and enjoying a swift recovery. Per our conversation today, I included the medical records release form. This form authorizes me to share your medical records with the Pentagon Review Board for the purpose of awarding you the Secretary's Defense of Freedom Medal.

Halliburton is saying to the truckdriver: We would like you to sign a release so that we, Halliburton, can send information on your medical situation to the Defense Department and get you a Defense medal for the Defense of Freedom.

Here is what they said to this wounded truckdriver, an employee of their

subsidiary Kellogg Brown and Root: Authorization and release reform, use and disclosure of protected information. It is a lengthy form. The truckdriver who signed this said: I am going to allow you to turn my medical records over to the Defense Department. And then under section 9, it says:

Release: I agree that in consideration for the application for a Defense of Freedom Medal on my behalf that on behalf of myself, my hires, executors, administrators, assigns, and successors, I hereby release, acquit and discharge and do hereby release, acquit and discharge KBR, all KBR employees, the military, and any of their representatives, collectively and individually, with respect to any claims and any and all causes of action of any kind or character, known or unknown, that I may have against any of them.

What they have said to the employee in a deceitful way, in my judgment, is: We would like you to sign a medical release form so we can apply for a Defense Medal of Freedom for you. First, there is no such thing as being able to apply for a Defense Medal of Freedom. You are either entitled to it or you are not.

In any event, they are saying to the truckdriver, buried in No. 9, in exchange for that, you should assign away all your rights against this company or any actions of the company or any employee of the company.

This is unbelievably deceptive. Here is a company, Halliburton, saying to a truckdriver that was wounded, an employee of theirs—by the way, the testimony yesterday by other truckdrivers who were wounded in action is that Halliburton knew they sent a convey right into hostile action on a road that was marked red and black, which meant no travel by a civilian convey. They deliberately sent them onto that road anyway. Seven people were killed in that circumstance.

Aside from all of that—and that is important in itself—this company has written to its former employee, a wounded truckdriver, saying: We would like to send your medical records to the Pentagon, and we would like to get for you this Defense of Freedom Medal. So would you please sign this—not pointing out to him that he is signing away all of his rights to take action against that company or anybody in that company.

I have the standards of the Defense Medal of Freedom right here. Let me show the date. It is in 2001:

Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld announced today the creation of the Defense of Freedom Medal to honor civilian employees of the Department of Defense injured or killed in the line of duty. It will be the civilian equivalent of the military's Purple Heart. The first recipients to be honored will be the Defense Department civilians injured or killed recently as a result of the terrorist attack on the Pentagon. At the discretion of the Secretary of Defense, the medal may be awarded to nondefense employees, such as contractors, based on their involvement in Department of Defense activities.

This is unbelievably deceptive, and I believe deceitful, to try to persuade a

former employee of this company to sign a release form saying it is a release of medical records when, in fact, it is a release of much more.

I am going to ask the inspector general to investigate exactly what this contractor has done.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator's time has expired.

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority controls 15 minutes. The Senator from New Hampshire is recognized.

ACTIONS OF THIS CONGRESS

Mr. GREGG. Mr. President, I want to talk today a little bit about the progress we are making relative to securing our borders in the United States as a result of efforts made by this Congress and the administration. Before I do, I want to comment briefly on the presentation of the Senator from Illinois relative to the actions of this Congress and its passage of legislation or its investigative activity.

It is truly disingenuous when the assistant leader of the Democratic side comes to the floor and says we have done nothing as a Congress when almost every major piece of legislation that has been brought to the floor of this Senate has been filibustered by the other side of the aisle. Bill after bill after bill has been stymied, stopped and, in fact—it is no secret—there is an open understanding around here that the purpose of the Democratic leadership has been to make it virtually impossible to pass legislation in the Senate in order that the Senate appear to be an ineffective body—their feeling being that if they can obstruct enough things, they can make an argument that Congress isn't functioning and they should be put in charge.

It is an ironic position, of course, and has been on a number of times characterized as being similar to the situation when a man who shot both his parents, when brought before the court, asked for mercy because he declared himself an orphan. The fact is that the Democratic leadership of this body has decided to actively obstruct and try to stop almost any legislation of any significance that has come to the floor and, as a result, many things have been stopped because, as we all know, this is a body which functions essentially on a 60-vote majority, not a 51-vote majority. So, therefore, even though the Republican Party has 55 votes, we cannot pass something if there is united opposition. It has happened again and again.

I do find it a bit disingenuous to make this argument—it is their right to make it—but I think an honest reflection of what is actually happening around here makes the argument rather superficial and inadequate in its essence and its purpose.